

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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O 220611Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9915

INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

COMUSSAG NKP THAI IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY SAIGON IMMEDIAE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 5218

EXDIS

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS CP PINT PINS

SUBJECT: U.S. AIRLIFT INTO POCHENTONG: AMBASSADOR'S

CALL ON THE MARSHAL

1. THIS MORNING (MARCH 22), ONE DC-8 AND ONE C-130 SUSTAINED DAMAGE FROM INCOMING ROCKETS AT POCHENTONG. ONE ENGINE ON THE DC-8 WAS SET ON FIRE; THE FIRE HAS BEEN EXTINGUISHED. THE C-130 HAD TWO TIRES BLOWN, DAMAGE TO COCKPIT AREA AND FUEL AND HYDRAULIC LEAKS. BOTH OF THESE PLANCES ARE STILL AT POCHENTONG. FORTUNATELY NO AMERICANS WERE HURT. THE CREWS OF THESE TWO DAMAGED AIRCRAFT HAVE BEEN FLOWN BACK TO THAILAND.

2. AS A RESULT OF THESE HITS, GENERAL BURNS (USSAG) HAS TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED THE AIRLIFT. I RECEIVED A TELEPHONE CALL FROM ADMIRAL GAYLER AT 1045 HOURS LOCAL URGING THAT FANK MAKE MAXIMUM EFFORTTO SECURE THE ROCKET BELT AREA IN ORDER TO REDUCE THE THREAT TO POCHENTONG AIRPORT FROM THAT AREA.

3. A HALF-HOUR AFTER THIS TELEPHONE CALL, I SAW MARSHAL LON NOL TO EXPLAIN TO HIM AGAIN THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVIDING ADEQUATE SECURITY FOR POCHENTONG AIRFIELD SO THAT THE AMERICAN AIRLIFT CAN CONTINUE. I WAS ACCOMPANIED BY TWO SENIOR MISSION OFFICIALS. I NOTED
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THAT I HAD CALLED ON HIM TWO DAYS EARLIER BECAUSE OF

THE FAILURE OF FANK TO FOLLOW UP ON ITS SUCCESS IN TUOL LEAP. THIS FAILURE, I REMINDED THE MARSHAL, WAS THE RESULT OF HIS INTERFERING WITH THE MILITARY COMMAND STRUCTURE AND NOT PERMITTING THE GENERAL STAFF TO DO ITS JOB UNIMPEDED. I SAID THAT IF FANK HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO CONTINUE ITS GROUND OPERATION NORTH OF TUOL LEAP, PERHAPS THE ENEMY ROCKETEERS WOULD BY NOW BE OUT OF RANGE OF POCHENTONG. I URGED THAT THE FANK COMMANDERS TAKE THE NECESSARY ACTION RAPIDLY TO REDUCE THE ROCKET THREAT TO THE AIRPORT.

4. THE MARSHAL IMMEDIATELY SUMMONED THE CHIEF OF STAFF, GENERAL SAK SUTASKHAN, AND THE KAF COMMANDER, GENERAL EA CHHONG, SO THAT HE COULD PASS ON OUR PROFOUND CONCERN AND TO ASSURE THAT ACTION IS TAKEN FORTHWITH. THE KHMERS ARE THINKING IN TERMS OF HEAVY KAF AIR STRIKES, FOLLOWED UP BY GROUND ATTACKS, IN THE ROCKET BELT AS THE BEST WAY TO REDUCE QUICKLY THE ROCKET THREAT. I OPINED THAT IF FANK MOVES SWIFTLY AND TAKES THE NECESSARY MEASURES ON THE GROUND, I REMAIN HOPEFUL THAT THE AIRLIFT CAN BE RESUMED WITHOUT UNDUE DELAY. DEAN

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